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IN OUR OPINION

Cities in decline hurt all of state

■ Local leaders, with help from state, must work harder to rebound

Michigan cities continue to fall behind the rest of the state on critical measures such as population, property values, crime, income, employment, poverty and health. The new "State of Michigan Cities" report by the Michigan Higher Education Land Policy Consortium studied 13 urban communities and concluded that many of them are in crisis.

That's bad news for the whole state. Struggling cities hold back entire regions — and

Urban population

	2000	2005 estimate	Change
Detroit	951,270	886,671	-6.8%
Ann Arbor	114,024	113,271	-0.7%
Battle Creek	53,364	53,202	-0.3%
Flint	124,943	118,551	-5.1%
Grand Rapids	197,800	193,760	-2.0%
Kalamazoo	77,145	72,700	-5.8%
Lansing	119,128	115,518	-3.0%
Muskegon	40,105	39,919	-0.5%
Pontiac	66,337	67,331	1%
Saginaw	61,799	58,361	-5.6%
Traverse City	14,532	14,513	-0.1%
Warren	138,247	135,311	-2.1%
Wyoming	69,368	70,122	1%
Total	2,028,062	1,939,250	-4.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Sub-County Population Projection 2004-05

Despite the critical importance of healthy cities, too many legislators in Lansing act as if they are allergic to anything

urban. But a short drive from the Capitol rotunda would show them much of what the "State of Michigan" report lays out. Lansing faces the same problems as most Michigan cities. Its population is falling while unemployment and poverty rates are rapidly rising.

State government can't fix the urban crisis by itself, but it can help ensure that cities get adequate revenue sharing and state aid for mass transit. It can encourage smart growth and regional cooperation by rewarding it financially. And it can stop subsidizing sprawl through costly road expansion projects. The Bipartisan Urban Caucus should become active again to advocate for cities in the Legislature. That said, local leaders must do most of the

City poverty rates

Percent of population in poverty	2000	2005
Detroit	26.1	31.4
Ann Arbor	16.6	22.3
Battle Creek	14.4	*14.9
Flint	26.4	32.5
Grand Rapids	15.7	20.8
Kalamazoo	24.3	30.2
Lansing	16.9	24.4
Muskegon	20.5	*22.4
Pontiac	22.1	22.7
Saginaw	28.5	*28.6
Traverse City	8.4	*11.5
Warren	7.4	11.7
Wyoming	7.3	12.6
Average	21.4	26.2
State	10.5	13.2

*2003 estimates
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's recent Neighborhood Initiative, targeting six Detroit neighborhoods for concerted action, is a start. Chicago, New York, Cleveland, San Francisco, Milwaukee and others can show successful strategies for urban renewal. Gov. Jennifer Granholm could help by creating an urban office or task force to provide local governments with technical expertise and best practice models from around the country.

Michigan cannot move forward if its cities continue to fall back. Nationwide, there are enough examples of comeback cities to be optimistic, but only if leaders, elected and non-elected, dispel the gloom and pessimism they too often attach to urban Michigan.